

NEWS RELEASE

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USDA ANNOUNCES NEW CONSERVATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE POLICY

WASHINGTON, Feb. 15, 2005—U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Bruce Knight today released a new comprehensive policy for operating the Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA). NRCS is the federal government's principal agency for providing conservation technical assistance on private land.

“This program is the foundation for how USDA provides on-the-ground conservation assistance to customers and focuses on local natural resource issues that are of state and national concern,” Knight said. “Through CTA, NRCS helps people voluntarily conserve, improve and sustain natural resources on their land.”

The new CTA policy establishes national priorities for the program. This year, priorities focus on helping farmers and ranchers comply more easily with environmental regulatory burdens and are consistent with the national priorities already established for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Re-setting these priorities establishes the importance of CTA in supporting the President's Management Agenda and increases the program's effectiveness and efficiency.

NRCS provides technical assistance to private landowners, conservation districts, tribes, state and local governments, and nongovernmental organizations through a national network of locally respected, technically skilled, professional conservationists. CTA helps landowners reduce erosion, improve soil health, improve water quantity and quality, restore and conserve wetlands, enhance fish and wildlife habitat, improve air quality, improve pasture and range health, reduce upstream flooding, improve woodlands, and address other natural resource issues. Through CTA, landowners develop conservation plans that may serve as a basis for their enrollment in USDA financial assistance and conservation easement programs.

Additional information is on the Web at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cta>.

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